

Destination branding and overtourism

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1 Introduction

Across the world many destinations are voicing their concern regarding the development of the tourism industry. Some destinations have even taken measures to stop visitors coming in. This is what [Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato \(2018\)](#) refer to as *Trexit* (Tourist exit). This Research Note argues that the branding strategy adopted by these destinations is playing a significant role in the emergence of overtourism. So far, no research has investigated branding, and more broadly marketing as the reason of overtourism. Existing research mainly investigates the consequences of overtourism, namely anti-tourism movements, tourismphobia and pollution, etc. ([Paris, 2017](#); [Petkar, 2017](#); [Seraphin, Yallop, Capatina, & Gowreesunkar, 2018](#); [Yazdi & Khanalizadeh, 2017](#)) and potential solutions like the education of tourists, providing authentic experience to visitors; putting in place respective campaigns aimed at tourists, etc. to tackle the issue ([Buckley, 2017](#); [Gordon, 2017](#); [Sissic, 2017](#)). This Research Note is therefore contributing to the overall debate regarding overtourism and more importantly, is providing applicable solutions that could be implemented by practitioners and more specifically, destination marketers.

2 Overview of ‘destination branding’

2.1 Literature review

The branding strategy of a destination could be considered as successful when there is a strong level of congruence between the perception of the destination by visitors and the brand identity intended by the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) ([Pike & Mason, 2011](#)). Developing the right branding strategy is all the more important as it can lead to customer loyalty ([Bianchi & Pike, 2011](#)). Other benefits include: Building a desirable image that can attract tourists; differentiation with competitors; increasing the economic contribution of tourism; and managing the image of the destination ([Park & Petrick, 2005](#)); standing out from the rest; appealing to target audience's emotional aspirations; enabling effective targeting to attract potential consumers; communicating the objective of the destination to the target market; enabling immediate recognition ([Marti, 2005](#)); and educating visitors ([Stubbs, 2012](#)). If logo design (corporate name, design, typeface, tagline, symbolic elements) is part of the branding strategy of any organisation ([Foroudi, Melewar, & Gupta, 2014](#); [Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou, & Salonika, 2016](#)), the branding strategy needs to

go way beyond just designing a logo, as on its own it has proven very limited in terms of ability to convince potential visitors (Kladou et al., 2016), despite the fact that the slogan or tagline has an exclusive appeal and plays on the affective component in the overall message (Gali, Camprubi, & Donaire, 2016). Yet, DMOs focus their effort mainly on logo design (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2014).

Nowadays, it is extremely important for any branding strategy to incorporate elements related to social identity, community and sustainability of the destination (Dioko, 2015). Indeed; Seraphin et al. (2018) explained that any branding or rebranding strategy put in place by a DMO needs to capture the essence of the destination. Seraphin et al. (2018) and Seraphin, Pilato, and Platania (2017) also pointed out that now more and more destinations are moving away from an idiosyncratic identity-based strategy to more universal stereotype strategies. Equally important, Seraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar and Bonnardel (2016), explained that in their branding strategy, destinations should adopt an ambidextrous approach by combining elements based on the identity and history (past) of the destination and elements that are more marketing and aesthetically based (future). Above all, Saraniemi (2010), explained that the branding strategy of the destination should be a co-creation activity involving all stakeholders.

Based on the preceding literature, events may be a suitable tool to be used for the branding of a destination. Indeed, De Freitas Santos, Vareiro, Remoaldo and Cadima Ribeiro (2016), listed the benefits of cultural mega-events as follows: enhance city's image; foster strong sense of community; foster trust and cooperation within the community; attract tourists and investment; and drive economic growth; place making (Richards, 2014). Having the right branding strategy is important for all destinations (Bianchi & Pike, 2011), but it is all the more important for destinations with a negative image because the image people outside the destination have is based on image broadcasted by autonomous agents such as the media (Gartner, 2000 cited in Seraphin, Butcher & Korstanje, 2016). Those images do not always reflect the reality (Seraphin, Butcher & Korstanje, 2016). A repositioning, in other words, correcting the negative image or creating a new image (Chacko & Hawkins Marcell, 2008) becomes in that case very important. Repositioning can be achieved by: (1) determining the present position of the destination (2) determining what position is wished to be occupied (3) ensuring the new product is different from the previous one (4) undertaking repositioning strategy and finally (5) continuing to measure if there is a position change in the desired direction (Chacko & Hawkins Marcell, 2008).

Table 1 (below) summarises existing research in the area of destination branding.

Table 1 Overview of research in the area of destination branding.

alt-text: Table 1

Source: The author

Author(s)	Year	Summary
Seraphin, Yallop, Capatina and Gowreesunkar	2018	Any branding or rebranding strategy put in place by DMO needs to capture the essence of the destination More destinations are moving away from an idiosyncratic identity-based strategy to more universal stereotype strategies
Platania, Pilato & Seraphin	2017	More destinations are moving away from an idiosyncratic identity-based strategy to more universal stereotype strategies
Richards	2017	Events contributes to placemaking
Gali, Camprubi & Donaire	2016	Importance of Slogan or tagline (logo)
Kladou, Kevaratzis, Rigopoulou & Salonika	2016	A logo in itself is not enough in terms of destination branding
Seraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar & Bonnardel	2016	Branding strategy should adopt an ambidextrous approach
De Freitas Santos, Vareiro, Remoaldo and Cadima Ribeiro	2016	Role of cultural mega-events in enhancing destination image
S��raphin, H., Butcher, J. & Konstanje, M.	2016	Identifying the right branding is extremely important for destinations with a negative image
Dioko	2015	Social identity, community and sustainability must be part of the branding strategy of a destination
Foroudi, Melewar & Gupta	2014	Key elements of a logo
Blain, Levy & Ritchie	2014	DMOs focus their effort on logo design despite it inefficiency on its own
Stubbs	2012	Purpose of a branding strategy
Pike & Mason	2011	Definition of a successful branding strategy for a DMO
Bianchy & Pike	2011	Successful branding strategy can lead to customer loyalty
Saraniemi	2010	Destination branding strategy should be the result of co-creation between all stakeholders

Chako & Marcell	2008	Strategy for repositioning a destination
Park & Petrick	2005	Benefits of branding for a destination
Marti	2005	Benefits of a logo






2.2 Examples of over-visited destinations branding (logo)

As a logo is the key focus of most DMOs when branding or rebranding a destination (Blain et al., 2014), the Table 2 below, provides a very brief overview of how some of the destinations (Barcelona, Cambridge, Dubrovnik, Florence, Oxford, Rome, Stratford-on-Avon, Venice, and York) that have been victims of overtourism over the summer 2017 (Coldwell, 2017; Seraphin et al., 2017) are currently branding themselves (logo).

Table 2 Branding (logo) of destinations victim of overtourism.

alt-text: Table 2

Source: The author

	A	B	C
1	 alt-text: Image 1	 alt-text: Image 2	 alt-text: Image 3
2	 alt-text: Image 4	 alt-text: Image 5	 alt-text: Image 6

A1: Barcelona; B1: Florence; C1: Oxford; A2: Venice; B2: York; C2: Roma, are not using any idiosyncratic identity-based strategy but more universal stereotype strategies. As for the slogan of the destinations, they follow the same pattern. For instance, Barcelona is: ‘*Barcelona inspires*’; and Roma is: ‘*Roma and You*’ (Gali et al., 2016). This Research Note, based on the results of the literature review and the results of the analysis of the branding strategies of the destinations used as examples tentatively argues that there is a match between the universal stereotype branding strategies adopted by DMOs (Table 2) and the current behaviour of visitors who are ‘flocking’ to some destinations. For Seraphin et al. (2017), this strategy aims at attracting maximum visitor numbers, this strategy is also adopted by the majority of DMOs worldwide (Seraphin et al., 2017). Some destinations are even thinking of *Trexit* (tourist exit) as a strategy to tackle overtourism (Seraphin et al., 2018). This strategy has potentially led to overtourism. This happens when: (a) the number of tourists is higher than the number of locals (b) when a destination has reached the maximum limit to tourism development, also known as carrying capacity (c) when the destination is suffering the strain of tourism (Richardson, 2017 cited in Seraphin, Sheeran & Pilato, 2018; Seraphin et al., 2018; Singh, 2018). Overtourism has in turn led to ‘tourismphobia’, which is the hatred and rejection of tourists (Calzada, 2018; Singh, 2018), and also to anti-tourism movements, in other words, movements bringing together all the enemies of tourism (Calzada, 2018).

Overall, the branding strategies in place in destinations who are victims of overtourism, might be exacerbating the already existing potential of these cultural cities to attract visitors (Borg, Costa & Gotti, 1996 cited in Seraphin et al., 2018, p. 2). A (re)branding strategy based on identity, heritage, culture, sustainability, as suggested by Dioko (2015) and Séraphin, Butcher, et al. (2016a,b; 2018), should tackle the issue. This naturally leads to the topic of Special Interest Tourism (SIT).

3 Toward a Special Interest Tourism (SIT) branding approach

3.1 Special Interest Tourism (SIT)

Other terms used alongside SIT are: alternative, sustainable, appropriate, new, responsible, eco, niche, responsible and ego tourism (Jin & Sparks, 2017; Trauer, 2006). SIT occurs ‘when the traveller’s motivation and decision-making are primarily determined by a particular special interest with a focus either on activity/ies and/or destinations and settings’ (Hall & Weiler, 1992 cited in Trauer, 2006, p. 186). SIT contributes to enhancing the image of a destination; to enriching tourists’ experiences and is profitable to a wider range of providers (Jin & Sparks, 2017). Equally important, and directly related to our study, Trauer (2006) implies that SIT contributes to local resident’s happiness as this form of tourism is a result of peoples desire for a good quality of life. In the UK, Scotland is a good example of a destination using SIT as a branding strategy (Park, 2014). SIT does have some limitations due to the fact it is quite niche, therefore very sensitive to changes. It is all the more the case for destinations with a SIT based on natural features like niche markets such as diving, etc. (Holden, 2013).

3.2 Repositioning

The repositioning strategy suggested in this Research Note is not about deterring visitors to the destination, but instead, identifying a strategy that would still encourage people to visit the destination while reducing the volume of visitors. So doing, the destinations who are victims of overtourism could brand each region of the destination as SIT destinations by focusing on a particular type of experience they want to offer to potential visitors. As [Stubbs \(2012\)](#) explained, there is more than one way to brand a destination. Taking the example of music, he claimed that a great song can make a place or destination famous, and can encourage people to visit the destination. [Stubbs \(2012\)](#) also suggested other tools that could be used to brand a destination and provided examples of destinations that used them successfully ([Table 3](#)).

Table 3 Tools to brand a destination.

alt-text: Table 3

Source: The author

Tool	Example	Destination
Music/song	New York, New York	New York
Football team	Liverpool FC	Liverpool
Architecture	Harbour Bridge (Opera)	Sydney
Events (sport, etc.)	Olympics	London
Film/TV	Harry Potter	UK
Sign	Hollywood sign	Hollywood
Attractions	Eiffel Tower	Paris
Venues	The Ice Hotel	Sweden

The typology provided in [Table 3](#) presents some limitations because some examples of tools to brand a destination can fit into different types. For example, The Eiffel Tower (Paris) and the Ice Hotel (Sweden) would be good examples of (permanent or temporary) architecture. That said, this remains an anecdotal element.

As a repositioning strategy, retrograding could be defined as a strategy that draws ‘on personal nostalgia related to an individual's own memories and/or shared nostalgia concerning historical events or a specific period in history (...). Most of the brands studied are following a retrobranding strategy which involves combining old-fashioned forms with cutting-edge functions, updating the product to harmonise past and present’ (Brown et al., 2003 cited in [Dion & Mazzalovo, 2016](#), pp. 2-3). Retrobranding strategy is in line with the ambidextrous strategy suggested by [S raphin et al. \(2016a,b\)](#) but also with SIT and the will of destinations to keep receiving visitors but at a reasonable rate.

4 Conclusion

This Research Note argues that branding is not the only reason for overtourism. That said, branding plays a significant role in overtourism as it contributes to encourage visitation and repeat visitors to a destination ([Bianchi & Pike, 2011](#); [Huang & Lin, 2017](#); [Park & Petrick, 2005](#)). A branding strategy is even more effective when capitalising on emotions and connections visitors may have with the destination ([Chacko & Hawkins Marcell, 2008](#)). Taking the example of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina; [Chacko and Hawkins Marcell \(2008\)](#) provided evidence that (re)branding (and more generally, marketing) is a powerful tool when it comes to trigger the action of visiting a destination. [Walters and Mair \(2012\)](#) provided similar evidence following the 2009 Australian bushfire. [Volcic, Erjavec, and Peak \(2014\)](#), using post-war Sarajevo, also provided evidence of the power of (re)branding in boosting the number of visitors to a destination. The strength of branding comes from its alluring image (Schellhorn & Perkins, 2004 cited in [Brown & Cave, 2010](#)). The potential of branding to attract visitors is even more visible in heritage cities as it exacerbates the already existing potential of these cities to attract visitors. Hence the reason these cities are over visited (Borg, Costa & Gotti, 1996 cited in [Seraphin et al., 2018](#), p. 2). For [Russo \(2000](#), p. 2), ‘tourism in heritage cities can prove unsustainable’. On that basis, it is important for destinations who are victims of overtourism to rethink their branding strategy. ‘It is also useful for the industry to understand branding as a philosophy, rather than taking it as just a collection of advertising campaigns or just a brand strategy choice’ (Urde, 2003 cited in [Saraniemi, 2010](#), p. 253). A brand can convey the core values, commitment and promise of stakeholders ([Saraniemi, 2010](#)). On that basis, a repositioning strategy could be orientated towards the core values that ‘the noble objective of tourism is to promote fellow feeling and brotherhood, not avarice or hatred’ ([Singh, 2018](#), p. 416). As for commitment and promise, they could be based on the fact public places must remain enjoyable first for the local residents which will subsequently lead to enjoyable public places for visitors. This recommendation is based on two elements: First, locals stop enjoying their environment due to cultural loss, public deterioration and saturation due to overtourism ([Sanchez-Fernandez, Alvarez-Bassi, & Cardona, 2017](#)). Second, the happiness of local residents contributes positively to the experience of visitors ([Croes, Ridderstaat, & van Niekerk, 2018](#); [Croes, Rivera, Semrad, & Khalizadeh, 2017](#)). The nostalgia and old-fashioned dimension of retrobranding ([Dion & Mazzalovo, 2016](#)) could be instrumental in the rebranding and

repositioning of over visited destinations. In every aspect of the management of the destination, DMOs should adopt an ambidextrous management approach, this is all the more important as the tourism industry is by nature an ambidextrous industry (Hooper & Lennon, 2017; Sanchez & Adams, 2008). Sanchez and Adams, (2008) even said that tourism has a Janus-face character. Addressing the issue of overtourism is extremely important as over the summer 2017, it led to anti-tourism movements and tourismphobia (Monterrubbio, 2017; Seraphin et al., 2018). As the branding of a destination is not a fixed process but an evolving process (Saraniemi, 2010), the current context makes rebranding (and repositioning) a necessity.

Future research in the area of overtourism could be orientated by some predictions developed by Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte (2016) for the future of food tourism, but also by some predictions made by Yeoman (2013) regarding the industry as a whole. Indeed, he argued that 10 factors can shape the future of consumption in the tourism industry: (1) with globalisation there are increasing occasions to celebrate (2) a trend toward nostalgia (3) leisure tastes are more sophisticated (4) mobile devices and augmented reality that embellish the real world (5) leisure choice is taking a much more visual form (6) the search for authentic experience and cutting-edge leisure activities (7) rising income is creating a more demanding and sophisticated service (8) increased longevity and ageing population (9) consumers are sensitive to ethical issues (10) increasing interest to parade one's social and cultural capital. Examples of future research in the area of overtourism could include: The political implications of overtourism (what strategy will be put in place by political leaders to guarantee the happiness of their citizens while maintaining income from the tourism industry); the romanticised image of some destinations (the difference between the alluring image of a destination and the reality); the type of experience that tourists in over visited destinations will get (escapist or authentic experiences).

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